

Local program offers support to family facing illness

JFCS' Twin Cities Jewish Healing Program creates home away from home for nine-year-old boy with genetic disease and his mother

By ERIN ELLIOTT BRYAN
Community News Editor

Before this year, nine-year-old David Cox, of Miami, Fla., was an honor roll student. But then he began having problems in school — his grades fell, he couldn't comprehend simple concepts and he struggled to pay attention.

His pediatrician diagnosed him with attention deficit disorder (ADD) and David began seeing psychiatrists who prescribed medication for ADD and hyperactivity. But after a few months, there was no improvement in David's condition and his mother began noticing changes in his handwriting.

"I showed them to the psychiatrist and she said that that was not attention deficit, and it was not the medication," David's mother, Myra Kalb, told the AJW. "She said it was something neurological and that we should see a neurologist."

After an MRI and a blood test, David was correctly diagnosed with adrenoleukodystrophy (ALD), a genetic brain disorder that destroys the protective sheath surrounding the brain's nerve cells, which allow humans to think and control muscles. The disease is present in one in 18,000 people and, because it affects the X chromosome, only afflicts boys and men.

The most devastating form of ALD appears in childhood, generally between the ages of four and 10 years old,

when normal, healthy boys suddenly begin to regress.

"It doesn't know any bounds, as far as race goes," Kalb said of the disease, which affects all ethnicities. "It doesn't care, it just rears its ugly head and, unfortunately, it can take your kid with it in a short period of time."

Kalb was advised to take her son to the University of Minnesota's Amplatz Children's Hospital, where the disease is being studied. They arrived on July 22 for an approximate 100-day stay, leaving behind David's father and older brother in Florida.

David arrived walking and talking, but is now bed-bound and unable to communicate. Though Kalb has a room at the nearby Ronald McDonald House, she has stayed at her son's bedside nearly 24 hours a day since his admission.

After a routine visit with Kalb, the hospital's chaplain contacted the Twin Cities Jewish Healing Program, a program of Jewish Family and Children's Service of Minneapolis (JFCS). Program Coordinator Judy Marcus got in touch with Kalb to see what she might need, and put together a group of volunteers who wanted to help.

"They've been wonderful, an absolute godsend," Kalb said. "You couldn't ask for anything nicer [than] to come to a city where you know nobody and people reach out to you and treat you just like you're family, just like you've been friends with

them forever."

Volunteers visit with Kalb or sit with David while she runs back to the Ronald McDonald House for a quick meal. Other volunteers have picked up Kalb's friends and family at the airport, taken her shopping or to synagogue services, and invited her into their homes for dinner.

Another volunteer has helped Kalb begin to plan for her older son's Bar Mitzva, which is set for Nov. 11, 2011 (11-11-11). Kalb's older son also inherited the gene mutation, but only his adrenal gland, not his brain, has been affected; he will be on medication for the rest of his life.

And one volunteer even stayed overnight at the hospital, so Kalb and her husband Jeff could spend some time alone when he came to visit for the weekend.

All of the Healing Program volunteers who have contact with David have undergone specialized training, but they do not perform any personal care.

"Just having a connection with people was a big thing," Kalb said. "I guess having a Jewish connection has been a plus."

On Aug. 8, David underwent a procedure to transplant donor stem cells, which are intended to replace the cells

that have already been destroyed. By using donor cells, David's blood type will eventually change from O-negative to A-positive.

"It is new life when you think about it," said Kalb, who asked for a rabbi from the Healing Program Clergy

At press time, Kalb still anticipated being in Minnesota for another three weeks, depending on how David tolerated more procedures. Healing Program volunteers will continue to help out as long as they're needed.

"They take me around and give me a little normalcy of life outside of being 24/7 inside the hospital with him," Kalb said, "and that helps a lot with your own healing."

The Twin Cities Jewish Healing Program, a program of Jewish Family and Children's Service, partners with Twin Cities health-care facilities to provide support to Jewish patients — a service otherwise unavailable to Jewish individuals who are not affiliated with a synagogue. TJCHP ensures that every Jewish patient requesting a clergy visit will receive one from its Healing Program Clergy Rotation, and visits from its trained volunteers. For information, contact Judy Marcus at 952-542-4840 or: jmarcus@jfcsmpls.org, or visit: www.jfcsmpls.org.

Donations for David Cox can be mailed to P.O. Box 170243, Miami, FL 33017-0243. They are also being accepted through Wacovia; call 800-922-4684 and donate to David's account, #3000191977816.

For information on adrenoleukodystrophy, visit: www.stopald.org.



Courtesy of Jeff Cox

Nine-year-old David Cox (right) is pictured with his family — brother Jonathan and parents Jeff and Myra — on a Disney Cruise.

Rotation to be present and offer a blessing. "We were blessing the stem cells, the new life that was coming into him."

Kalb also asked the rabbi to give David two additional Hebrew names, *Shimuel* (God has heard me) *Refa'el* (God has healed).

Israel can't use Bible to justify claims, Mideast synod says

(JTA) — A meeting of Mideast bishops declared that Israel cannot use the Bible to justify territorial claims to land in Israel.

The final statement of the two-week Synod of Bishops of the Middle East in Rome that ended Oct. 23 blamed Israel for the conflict between the Jewish state and the Palestinians.

It rejected the use of the biblical position of the Promised Land to justify Jewish settlement of the West Bank.

"Recourse to theological and biblical positions which use the Word of God to wrongly justify injustices is not acceptable," the bishops said.

The statement called for a two-state solution to the conflict and to

create a peaceful atmosphere that will prevent an exodus of Christians from the region.

The document also criticized Jewish settlement of Jerusalem, saying: "We have meditated on the situation of the holy city of Jerusalem. We are anxious about the unilateral initiatives that threaten its composition and risk to change its demographic balance."

Participants included more than 170 Catholic bishops from Muslim countries, as well as other Church figures and non-Catholic representatives and experts.

Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon rejected the statement.

"We express our disappointment

that this important Synod has become a forum for political attacks on Israel in the best history of Arab propaganda," Ayalon said. "The Synod was hijacked by an anti-Israel majority."

In his Oct. 24 Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, Pope Benedict XVI called on countries in the Middle East to guarantee religious freedom to non-Muslims. He said Middle East peace and a two-state solution were vital to solving the problems of the region.

"Peace is possible. Peace is urgent. Peace is an indispensable condition for a life worthy of the human person and of society," the pope said. "Peace is also the best remedy to avoid immigration from the Middle East."

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Bulldozer driver testifies in Corrie case

(JTA) — The Israeli soldier who ran over American activist Rachel Corrie with a bulldozer in Gaza testified in a Haifa courtroom.

The soldier, who has never been charged or tried in the death of the 23-year-old activist, and whose identity has never been revealed, testified hidden behind a wooden partition, just a few feet from Corrie's parents.

The civil wrongful-death lawsuit filed by Corrie's parents against Israel's Defense Ministry has been ongoing since March.

Corrie was run over and killed by an Israeli bulldozer in Gaza in 2003 as she attempted to prevent a Palestinian home from being demolished along with other members of the International Solidarity Movement. The driver said he did not see her, and her death was ruled an accident by the Israeli military.

The Corries were unsuccessful in a lawsuit against Caterpillar Inc., the American company that manufactured the bulldozer.